

## Making East Durham a 'children's zone'

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This is the third of a three-day series of articles examining the past, present and future of the East Durham neighborhood.

DURHAM -- More than three dozen local government, educational and nonprofit leaders are collaborating on a project that could bring a brighter future to East Durham.

The initiative is modeled after the Harlem Children's Zone, which offers a variety of free services to about 11,500 residents of a 100-block area in New York City.

A key figure in the effort, which goes by the working title of the East Durham Children's Initiative, is Ellen Reckhow.

"It's basically taking a very focused approach geographically so that you layer in services and create a continuum of support from birth through high school graduation that will lead to children being successful," the Durham County commissioner said. "And by focusing on a geographic area, the hope and expectation is that you change the culture of the neighborhood, the expectations of the people living in the neighborhood, that in fact there can be very successful outcomes for their children."

The East Durham Children's Initiative will introduce "baby college" for parents as well as focused programming and after-school offerings at Smith Elementary, Neal Middle and Southern High. The Holton Center will provide adult literacy courses overseen by Durham Technical Community College, a planner said.

Reckhow heard a radio segment about the Harlem Children's Zone on a Saturday afternoon last fall. An Internet search led her to New York Times Magazine editor Paul Tough's book "Whatever It Takes," a profile of the Children's Zone and its leader, Geoffrey Canada. Reckhow bought copies as holiday presents for her fellow county commissioners and the county manager.

Work on the project began in January. Discussions with educators led to the focus on the attendance zone of Y.E. Smith Elementary, one of Durham's worst-performing schools.

Durham Public Schools is already heavily involved in two major institutions in East Durham: the Holton Career and Resource Center, which will feature vocational training for high schoolers, community programs and a Duke-run health clinic; and Y.E. Smith Elementary, which is about to adopt a new educational format that includes a longer school day. (See accompanying stories.)



Mark Dolejs/ The Herald-Sun

The newly renovated house, shown on Wednesday and located at 405 Ottawa Ave., (left) stands in contrast to the house at 407 Ottawa Ave. (right), which is in need of repair.

But the project is very much a group effort.

"There's so many people at the table," said Minnie Forte-Brown, chairwoman of the Board of Education. "I mean, it has been phenomenal in terms of the kind of interest that it has drawn from a wide segment."

Durham's Partnership for Children, the county's Cooperative Extension office and departments of Public Health and Social Services, Communities in Schools, MDC Inc., Duke University Health System, Duke's Center for Child and Family Policy, Welcome Baby, Durham Connects and Smart Start are among those planning the initiative, which also involves city officials and community religious leaders.

Despite all the talks that have already taken place, much work remains to be done. Planners, who have not yet publicly announced the program, recently changed the working title from East Durham Children's Zone to East Durham Children's Initiative after learning that "children's zone" is the intellectual property of the Harlem Children's Zone.

Backers hope to line up both private funding as well as a federal grant. President Obama's proposed 2009-10 federal budget includes money to help replicate the Harlem Children's Zone program around the nation.

"It is ... a model of success for families and children," Forte-Brown said. "It helps to reshape and redefine the culture of a community. And we're really excited about having the opportunity to collaborate ... with people in our community to actually make it happen."



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